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Statement by Ambassador Herbert S. Okun, United States Representative to the 41st Session of the United Nations General Assembly, in Plenary, on Item 26, the Situation in Afghanistan, November 4, 1986

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Mr. President, a whole nation is dying. Even now, as we speak, innocent Afghan men, women, and children are being indiscriminately slaughtered -- simply because they refuse to relinquish what is theirs: their homes, their land, their families, their culture and religion, their way of life.

This Assembly has an abundance of well-documented material from many sources which describes the consequences of seven years of brutal Soviet onslaught against an entire nation. The UN Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan, whose report will be considered by the Assembly later in this session, has concluded that "the only solution to the human rights situation in Afghanistan is the withdrawal of all foreign troops. Continuation of the military solution will...lead inevitably to a situation approaching genocide."

"Genocide" is a term which means "the systematic killing of, or a program of action intended to destroy, a whole national or ethnic group." It is unconscionable that in today's world a situation exists that might justify being characterized as approaching genocide. Despite considerable efforts by the Soviet Union and the Kabul regime to restrict and manipulate news coverage of the war, no one -- certainly no one in this forum -- can claim to be ignorant about what is happening in Afghanistan.

Since the Soviet Union's unprovoked invasion of a friendly non-aligned neighbor seven years ago, we have gathered here to express our collective outrage at the transgressions of basic human rights being perpetrated against the Afghan people. We are all aware of the number and scope of violations of international humanitarian law being carried out in Afghanistan by the Soviet Union or its puppets. These include, but by no means are limited to:

The 1949 Geneva Conventions and Customary International Law designed to protect civilians; these proscribe murder and mutilation and the large scale use of anti-personnel weapons;

The 1925 Geneva Protocol and the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention which prohibit the use of asphyxiating, poisonous or other gasses;

Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which prohibits torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;

The 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.

This list -- incomplete as it is -- is impressive in its total disregard for the basic principles of human rights and decency. It is inconceivable in today's world that a country be permitted to remain unaccountable on the application of human rights. It is inconceivable that, among the world community of nations gathered here today, there are governments that continue to remain unmoved by the tragedy of Afghanistan -- so unmoved that they refuse to vote in favor of a resolution that merely asks that the Afghan people be permitted to determine their own fate in peace and dignity, free from the yoke of military oppression. Abstention on an issue affecting the survival of an entire people is inexcusable.

Have we become so accustomed to massacre and torture, to indiscriminate bombings and mutilation that we no longer comprehend the full horror of what is happening in Afghanistan? Is it not crystal clear that the situation in Afghanistan is not only one of violence and death, bombings and military encounters, but that it is a situation which, if permitted to continue unchecked, could result in the elimination of "a whole national or ethnic group?"

The very fabric of Afghanistan's traditional society is being rent under force of arms. Village life has been shattered; families have been separated; women widowed; children orphaned. Children are being born and raised in refugee camps and have no prospect of experiencing life in their own country. Children who remain in Soviet-dominated areas of Afghanistan are being taught a distorted version of Afghan history viewed through the prism of Marxist-Leninist dogma.

The world's largest refugee population has been created, as over one-third of Afghanistan's pre-war population has been violently displaced. And, as if this were not enough, the regime recently announced plans to relocate 30,000 people from areas near the Pakistani border to sparsely populated areas in western Afghanistan. Such a policy would almost certainly involve a massive violation of human rights; it also indicates the lengths to which the Soviet Union must go to deny popular support to the Afghan resistance.

After seven years of a war waged by a superpower against one of the poorest nations in the world, the Soviet Union has apparently realized that a national liberation movement cannot be conquered by

conventional military tactics and weaponry. Instead it has conceived and begun to implement a much more subtle three-pronged strategy composed of military, intelligence, and political measures. This military-political campaign, combining intimidation and violence with subtle bribery and a massive propaganda effort, is intended to permit the Soviet Union to proceed to consolidate its power in Afghanistan with a minimum of international outcry.

Since its invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the Soviet Union has moved steadily towards creating a fighting force that is more appropriate to counterinsurgency. It has increased reliance on light airborne forces rather than heavy motorized columns; it has intensified ambush and interdiction operations along the border areas; it has significantly increased the number of Soviet special purpose forces, of which there are now over eight battalions in Afghanistan, roughly double the 1983 level.

This redefined military effort has been accompanied by a campaign to win hearts, minds, and pocket books led by the former chief of the Afghan secret police, Najibullah. There has been a dramatic increase in sabotage efforts in the tribal areas of Pakistan along the Afghanistan border. Bribery of tribal leaders, regional and town leaders, even religious leaders, has been accompanied by threats of violence as a penalty for cooperating with the mujahidin. Indoctrination efforts continue, aimed at creating a loyal cadre of pro-Soviet Afghans, and thousands of children are sent every year to the Soviet Union.

Despite these efforts, the Soviet Union is no closer today to consolidating its control over Afghanistan than it was on December 27, 1979, when its invading troops murdered President Amin -- the man who allegedly first invited Soviet troops into Afghanistan. The Soviet Union, despite all its efforts, cannot break the will of a people united in a national liberation struggle. The Afghan people will not, they cannot, acquiesce in what amounts to their own destruction as a people and as a nation. There is an old Afghan saying:

"The mujahid waited 100 years for his revenge and cursed himself for his impatience."

The Afghan people will never surrender. The magnitude of the Soviet threat -- not only militarily, but for traditional Afghan religious and cultural values -- has forged a unity of purpose among resistance fighters unparalleled in Afghanistan's history. Today, the resistance is cooperating more closely together than ever before -- joining forces, coordinating attacks, and sharing intelligence and battle techniques. Regular rocketing of Kabul, including the spectacular ammunition dump explosion on August 26, testifies to mujahidin ability to penetrate even the most fortified of Soviet security rings.

Fellow delegates, it is not the brave freedom fighters of Afghanistan who have failed to adapt and take countermeasures against a more subtle Soviet political strategy. Many of us in the world community of nations are being lulled into inaction by Soviet hints of flexibility. Many prefer to close their eyes and ears rather than acknowledge and demand a cessation of the horrors visited daily on the Afghan people.

On July 28, General Secretary Gorbachev announced the Soviet intention to withdraw six regiments from Afghanistan. This token withdrawal was hailed by the Soviets as "evidence" of their desire for a political settlement. In reality, it is intended to obscure the persistent Soviet refusal to provide a timetable for comprehensive withdrawal. Militarily insignificant, the so-called withdrawal has been unmasked by convincing evidence which indicates that significant additional amounts of equipment and troops were introduced into Afghanistan after the July 28 speech for the sole purpose of publicly withdrawing them. Many of you are familiar with this evidence.

If the Soviet Union wants to demonstrate its interest in a political settlement in Afghanistan, it need only respond to seven General Assembly resolutions which call for the immediate withdrawal of all foreign forces; it need only present a short timetable at Geneva for a complete troop withdrawal. This is the missing element in the search for an end to seven years of war and destruction in Afghanistan.

As we all know, the UN Secretary-General and his personal representative, Under-Secretary-General Diego Cordovez, have been conducting negotiations aimed at achieving a political settlement. The United States government supports the efforts of the Secretary-General and his representative and applauds their diligence and their commitment to a just and durable settlement. We have stated at previous sessions of the General Assembly -- and reiterate today -- that the United States firmly supports this process. We have made known our willingness, in writing, to play an appropriate guarantor's role with respect to a comprehensive and balanced settlement that protects the legitimate security interests of all concerned.

Three of the four basic documents which would comprise a comprehensive settlement have been largely completed. These include agreements on mutual non-interference and non-intervention, voluntary return of the refugees, and international guarantees. The fourth document, which was discussed for the first time in May of this year, lays out the interrelationship of the three documents to the central issue of Soviet troop withdrawals. Although progress has been made on the format and scope of this fourth instrument, the Soviet Union has persisted in its refusal to provide a realistic timetable for the complete withdrawal of all Soviet troops.

The time has come for deeds, not words. The Soviet Union is counting on outlasting the Afghans and those who support their fight for freedom. By prolonging the war and enshrouding it in mists and meaningless gestures, they are hoping and waiting for the world's attention span to slip, for our outrage to wane. We cannot permit this to happen. Collectively, we can and must help put an end to the carnage and destruction in Afghanistan. In voting for this resolution, let us demonstrate our commitment to the comprehensive political settlement which is now in sight, except for one missing element -- a short timetable for the withdrawal of all Soviet troops. In voting for this resolution, let us demonstrate that we -- the world community of nations -- will not permit the Afghan nation to perish from this earth. Thank you, Mr. President.

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